



**LEGAL SERVICES
FOR MAINE ELDERS**

Testimony of John Brautigam, Esq. before the
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
and the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

February 19, 2026

Executive Summary

- **Ask:** Fully fund Maine’s Eviction Prevention Program to prevent evictions for non-payment of rent.
- **Need:** Housing instability is immediate and devastating for the people LSE serves, and affordability pressure is extreme (65% of households at \$32,000 or less spend over half their income on rent; rents rose 32.1% from 2019–2025).
- **What works:** Early, targeted help can stop the eviction cycle, keep people housed, and cost less than shelter, General Assistance, and avoidable health impacts.
- **Landlord benefit:** Prevention helps landlords too by getting rent paid and avoiding turnover and court costs.
- **Gap and bottom line:** Some voucher or subsidized renters still lack a prevention tool even when a modest payment would avert displacement; this program is a practical near-term complement to long-term housing supply solutions.

Chairs Rotundo and Gattine, Chairs Curry and Gere, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

My name is John Brautigam, and I am here on behalf of Legal Services for Maine Elders. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would like to explain why LSE supports fully supplemental budget funding of Maine’s Eviction Prevention Program to prevent all evictions for non-payment of rent.

For the people we serve, housing instability is not an abstraction. It is a notice to quit. It is a missed court date because of a medical emergency. It is a sheriff’s writ of possession and the sudden

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threat of losing a long-time home. When that happens, choices shrink quickly, and a manageable problem becomes a crisis.

The affordability pressure behind these crises is severe. By 2023, 65% of Maine households making \$32,000 or less were paying more than half of their income toward rent. Between 2019 and 2025, Maine rents rose 32.1%.

Those numbers explain why so many renter households have no buffer. A single setback can turn into rent arrears, an eviction filing, and displacement.

Legal Services for Maine Elders works with older renters across Maine who are trying to stay housed. In addition to providing legal advice and representation, we have helped clients access various programs and coordinated with other supports when needed

Two brief client stories show both the urgency and the value of acting early.

First, Carol in Washington County fell behind on rent in an apartment she could not afford. Her niece and agent missed court because of a medical emergency, and a default judgment entered. Then the sheriff served a writ of possession, and the family was told they had 48 hours to leave. LSE moved quickly to explain options, reduce panic, and pursue steps to slow the process and identify any remaining avenues to prevent sudden displacement. This is what it looks like when the system only engages after the crisis has fully arrived.

Second, you may recall a story I have shared with you before about Howard. Howard lived in a motel where his housing was at risk because of rent arrears and an eviction case had already been filed. Through the eviction prevention support, the arrearage of over \$6,000 was paid, the motel dismissed the eviction proceeding, and Howard was able to remain housed while stabilizing other serious issues in his life.

This is what effective prevention looks like: a targeted intervention, at the right time, that short-circuits the eviction cycle and avoids a much more expensive and destabilizing outcome.

From an appropriations standpoint, the logic is straightforward. Evictions are expensive. They shift costs onto towns and the State through emergency shelter use, General Assistance, and avoidable health impacts from housing instability. Prevention is cheaper than response. It also works better for landlords because they get paid and avoid the time and cost of turnover.

As you consider program funding, I will also note one practical gap we see: some renters in subsidized housing or using vouchers still face eviction risk that leaves them without a prevention tool even when a modest, targeted payment would avert displacement.

Maine needs both long-term housing supply solutions and near-term tools that keep people stable while that work continues. The Eviction Prevention Program is a practical, targeted strategy that complements building efforts, reduces avoidable public costs, and helps older renters remain safely housed.

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Thank you for your time and consideration.